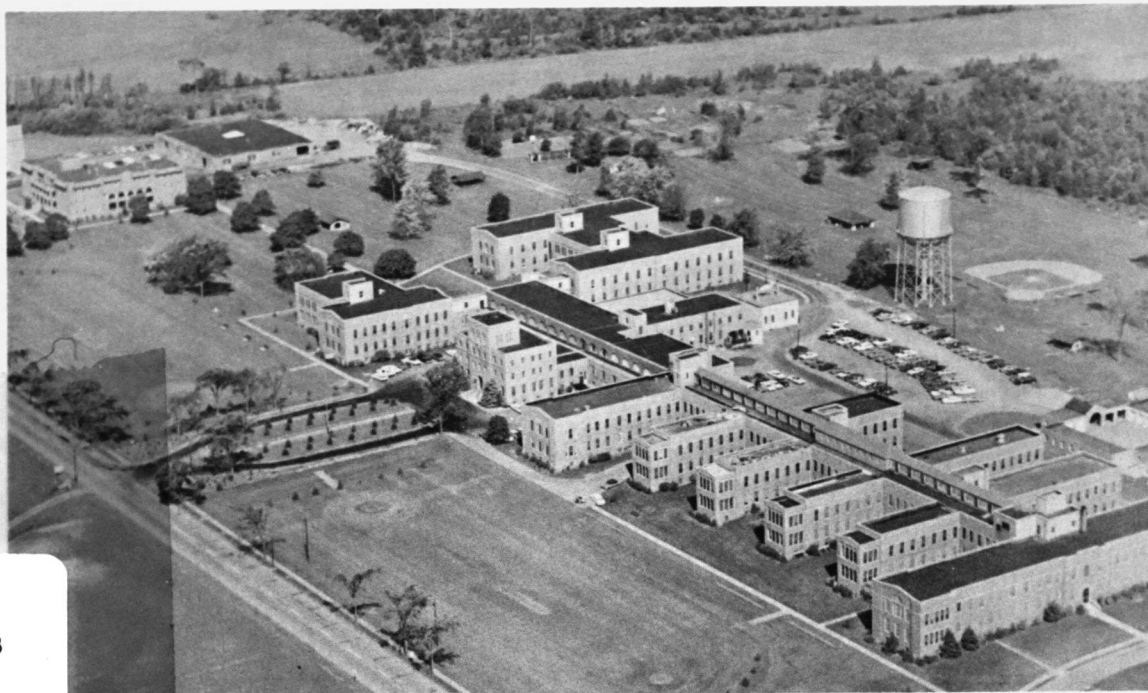


A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF

ALDEN



Infirmary and County Home, Wende.

F
116
.B83
H57
no.1

by Alden Historical Society

The date 1821 as the beginning of this history is misleading, for the area comprising Alden was actually occupied earlier. The records of the Holland Land Company show that in 1806 the first purchase of land in the present Town of Alden was made by Jonas Van Wey, who settled in the northwest corner of the town, now referred to as Millgrove. He probably purchased the land and then returned with his family like other settlers did in the early days. Three other men, Samuel Huntington, Zophar Beach and James C. Rowan

are recorded as having purchased land on the western edge at Town Line.

There are no other records of settlers until Moses Fenno (reputed to be the first settler of the Village of Alden) came in 1810. He is given credit for raising the first crops. He owned a part of lot 20 and built a cabin on lot 17. Moses Fenno was killed during the battle of Black Rock in December 1813. Records indicate that his wife Mary married a man by the name of Gates in 1815.

Originally, like the rest of the Holland Purchase, the land that became

Alden was in 1802 a part of the Town of Batavia and then in 1804 was made a part of Willink. In a general reorganization on March 11, 1808, Alden became a part of Clarence in Niagara County and remained so until 1821, when the county was divided, and Clarence became part of Erie County. By an act of the Legislature, Alden was separated from Clarence on March 27, 1823.

The years 1810-23 saw many settlers building cabins, clearing land and farming. Among these were: Joseph Freeman, William Snow, John, Nathaniel and Seth Estabrook, Samuel Slade, Arunah Hibbard, James Crocker, Jonas Stickney, Saxon Bailey, William Humphrey, Aaron Bunce, Nathan Willis, and John Webster. Some ambitious pioneers opened a store and a tavern. The first cemetery was organized about 1813 when Joseph Freeman gave his note for \$5 in payment for an acre of ground at the request of Mr. Cranasky, who became the first person buried therein. Old graves in Evergreen Cemetery include Mr. Estabrook, the man who named Alden after his mother-in-law. The oldest tombstone is that of Joshua Hendee who died November 6, 1819. The first birth of a white child in Alden was the daughter of Arunah Hibbard, who arrived about 1812.

The first town meeting March 27, 1823, was held at the home of Washburn Parker, and the following officers were elected: Edmond Badger, Supervisor; Homer Hendee, Town Clerk; William H. Dayton and Jonathan Larkin, assessors; Thomas Durkee, Collector; Thomas Farnsworth and John Van Wey, overseers of poor; Nathan Willis, James C. Thompson and Jesse Gressman, commissioners of highways; Samuel Slade, Silas Snow and Thomas Gregg, commissioners of common schools; Thomas Durkee and Simon Hill, constables. There were twelve "path-masters" (supervisors of "road districts" and responsible for road maintenance) who

would officiate as fence viewers, pound keepers and damage appraisers. A sum of \$75 was to be raised for the maintenance of roads and bridges and \$65 for the support of schools. It would appear by this impressive number of names that many in the town held some position.

During this same year 1823 the first Alden post office was established, and the postmaster was Joseph Freeman. Later Judge Freeman was a member and one of the founders of the first Anti-Slavery Society in Erie County.

In August 1826 a tract in Alden averaging about a mile and a quarter wide and nearly three miles long was bought from the Seneca Indians by the Ogden Land Company. This land was divided into lots and sold to the settlers. Alden then had an area of about 34½ square miles.

Today Alden is a friendly town of about 9,800 people. Donald Donnelly is the town's Supervisor, and the town offices are located in the Ewell Library on U.S. Route 20. The official paper for the town is the *Alden Advertiser* published by the Weisbeck family. Leonard Weisbeck purchased the business in 1959 from his father, the late Joseph Weisbeck, and has been editor and publisher since then.

From very early days as a farming area with tanneries, grist and fanning mills, Alden progressed to a community of general stores. Between 1830 and 1845 a large number of Germans arrived, who by their industry and energy aided the growth of the town. At the present time, homes rather than farms dominate the town. Alden has a new post office building erected in 1970, a fine business section along its main street (Broadway), excellent schools and numerous churches.

There is a full range of social, service and fraternal organizations, within the town. There are four fully equipped volunteer fire companies, and two of the companies have first aid squads with

emergency vehicles. Alden boasts one of the best town supervised youth recreation programs in Western New York.

According to census information, by 1865 the Town of Alden had 1,272 males and 1,248 females. There were 58 miles of public roads in the town. Dwellings were listed as 445 frame, 4 brick, 24 log, and 50 other for a total of 523 homes. Due to this fine growth and the efforts of dedicated citizens the Village of Alden was incorporated May 7, 1869. The first officers were: G. F. Vandervoort; E. W. Hendee; D. C. Skeelee; H. R. Kidder, Treasurer; C. N. Fulton, Assessor; Micajah Maxson, Commissioner of Streets; Fredricks Thatcher, Collector. At this time the village had several stores, one railroad depot, one tannery, one cheese factory, three hotels, and three churches.

Alden remains the only village in the town; however there are other settlements including: Alden Centre (Sandridge), Crittenden, Millgrove, Wende, Town Line, and West Alden.

Alden Centre (Sandridge) began in the spring of 1814 when John C. Rogers started a saw mill on Ellicott Creek (Eleven Mile Creek). About 1817 Rogers built a grist mill near his saw mill, which he settled west of Case the same year.

Wende Station on the New York Central Railroad was named after the late Dr. Ernest Wende. The Wende family was influential in bringing the Erie County Home and Infirmary as well as the Erie County Penitentiary to the Town of Alden.

Town Line was founded when Nathan Willis and John Webster located on the main road from Alden to Buffalo about 1812 and built saw mills on Cayuga Creek. An interesting event occurred in 1861 when Town Line seceded from the Union. This came about at a stormy meeting, held in the district schoolhouse, by a vote of 85 to 40. This resolution was drawn up on the schoolmaster's desk which has

presented to the Alden Historical Society.

The earliest settler in West Alden was probably B. F. Peck who came in 1835. Mr. Almon Perry kept a hotel for several years. A post office was established about 1870 and named West Alden. Stores were owned by Mr. Ira R. Martin, Mr. B. F. Peck and Mr. Charles Eels, who also



Spring Creek Cheese Factory.

was postmaster for a time.

The Spring Creek Cheese Factory operated by the Benjamin Gifford family began operations in 1880. Later the building burned and was rebuilt on the same site and continued well into the 19th century. The Baldwin Wagon Shop, also started in the 1880's, was operated by the Baldwin family. The business was handed down from father to son. They patented a cattle wagon for transporting cattle. This shop located on Exchange Street in the village, continued until 1930 and was torn down about 1939.

About 1843 the Buffalo and Attica Railroad Company built a line through the south side of the village, and in 1853 the Rochester and Buffalo Company built through the northern side of the town. In 1883 the Delaware, Lackawanna and

Western Company built their railroad between the other lines. Thus Alden had three railroads as access to a good market in the City of Buffalo and nearby towns.

A glassworks called the New York Glass Works was started by Vernon A. Pancoast in 1900; it was located on Railroad Street. The first bottles were blown in January 1901. Over 8,000,000 bottles were blown in one year. Machine blowing and the price of gas put this company out of business about 15 years after it started. However, during its operation the economy of Alden was greatly helped.

In 1906 Arthur Yates Bennett started the Dashboard Factory, which is now known as the Bennett Manufacturing Company. It manufactured metal dashboards for horse drawn buggies and wagons. The products have changed from dashboards to medicine cabinets and waste receptacles. These products are shipped all over the world.

While drilling for natural gas in 1891, black water was discovered at about 950 feet by the drillers, much to their disgust. It was by accident that the therapeutic value of the water was dis-

covered in 1903. The men working around the wells, seemed to get relief from their aches and pains, by putting on hot packs of the foul smelling stuff in the drillers shack.

"The Alden Black Water Bath House" on Main Street opened in November 1904. It was a frame building which soon burned. About 1915, this was replaced by a brick structure renamed "The Original Baths." This property was acquired by the Episcopal Diocese of Western New York in 1963. It has been remodeled and is the home of St. Aidan's Episcopal Church, with the Rev. Terrence E. Clarke as vicar.

The Alden Historical Society in cooperation with the Erie County Sesquicentennial and the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society placed a marker at the site of the original black water baths on August 2, 1971.

The Alden Park Bath House opened in 1910 on property that had been owned by George Farnsworth. It was later named Alden Inn. The property was bought by the Alden Methodist Church in 1966. The church plans on putting up a new building in the future.

The Alden Mineral Baths and Hotel



Original Bath House, Alden.

on the west side of Exchange Street north of the Erie Railroad depot, catered to the public in a building that had been built in 1851. This was the third black water bath house, later called "The Empire Hotel." It was burned on Christmas Eve, 1949 and never rebuilt. Alden was famous worldwide for these mineral baths from 1904 until 1963 when the last one closed.

In a joint New York State Legislative Committee investigation in 1936, Document No. 102, page 24, said: "Our conclusions are that Alden Black Mineral Water is especially beneficial in the treatment of rheumatism, arthritis, sciatica, neuritis, salt rheum, high and low blood pressure, and skin diseases. We have ascertained that these diseases are most prevalent in humanity.

The first public religious services were held by Rev. John Spencer, a circuit riding Presbyterian minister, in 1812 at the home of Joseph Freeman. The church was organized in 1813 and a building erected in 1833 on land donated by Thomas Farnsworth, Jr. His daughter Carrie, who later married Joseph E. Ewell, in 1910 gave land and money for a new church at 13298 Broadway, as a memorial to their daughter, Florence Josephine Ewell.

The Baptists organized in March 1833 and met in private houses until a church was dedicated in December 1852. There are no records as to when the church disbanded but the Baptists reorganized in January 1961, and the church is now at 13179 Broadway.

The first Catholic Services were held at Alden Centre in 1847. A small frame church was erected in 1850 and a new one built in 1861. This building served the parish until 1872 when an addition was put on the original building. The present building was dedicated on October 24, 1894, and was named St. John the Baptist. The parish includes a school, convent, rectory, and a cemetery.

The Town Line Lutheran Church was organized March 3, 1853, by German settlers. A brick building was erected and dedicated on August 17, 1853. The present stone and brick structure was completed in 1875. Stained glass windows were installed in 1908 and the first annex built in 1915. The educational wing was added in 1958.

The Methodist Church was organized at West Alden in 1850 and a building erected shortly thereafter. It was a strong church until 1883 when all religious services there ceased. The Methodist Church in the Village of Alden was organized in 1881 and met at the Alden Seminary and at the Pratt Hotel. A church, on the present site, was built in 1885, this church burned twice in 1928, and the present brick building was dedicated in 1929.

The Millgrove Bible Church started as "The German Evangelical Protestant St. John's Congregation" in 1867. The original church was built of hemlock planking, and for 50 years the mother tongue (German) was spoken daily and at Sunday worship. The strength of the church decreased by 1912, but was renewed by the Rev. Charles Riley in 1926. Due to his exceptional ability and enthusiasm, the congregation grew rapidly, and by 1931 the building more than doubled. In 1962, an entirely new building was constructed on adjacent land.

St. Paul's United Church of Christ at Town Line was organized in 1875 as the "German Evangelical Protestant St. Paul's Congregation." In 1875 a church was erected at the corner of Town Line Road and Broadway. Voluntary contributions were used to purchase the bell to be placed in the steeple. In 1962 the building was moved east on Broadway to a new location on the opposite side of the street. The steeple was damaged in the moving, and the bell now stands on a platform by the front door of the church, where it

continues to serve according to the motto cast into it, "Proclaim God with a Ringing Sound."

Crittenden Presbyterian Church was organized December 16, 1906, and the first church building dedicated in 1912. The church burned on November 14, 1944. The congregation met at the Odd Fellows Hall which was damaged by fire in 1945. The first unit of a new building was completed in 1950 on a new site. This contained a dining room with Christian education facilities. The Sanctuary was added in 1957.

The Alden Mennonite Church, located on Main Street in Alden, was built about 1927 by Mennonite people, who came from Michigan, Ohio, Louisiana, and Canada in 1921. They first worshiped in the church erected by the Methodists near Town Line.

St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, located in Crittenden, is a mission church.

The New Testament Church is located on the corner of Exchange Street and Henskee Road. It is primarily a Bible Church.

St. Aidan's Episcopal Church was organized in March 1960 and met at various places in town. The buildings and property of the "Original Black Water Baths" were acquired in 1963, and church services have been held there since Easter Sunday 1964.

The first school house in Alden built in 1815, was a log cabin on the site of the new Alden Post Office. The first teacher was Miss Mehitable Estabrook. In 1854, William C. Leonard, with the help of friends of education built a large frame building called "The Alden Female Seminary." Teachers were Misses Emily and Lucy Rundell and Miss Ellen Parker.

A Board of Education for public school was elected December 13, 1883. Members were: Dr. Lavinus Cornwell, President; Joseph E. Ewell, Clerk; Alois



Alden Union School.

Bohner, Jr.; DeWitt C. Skeelee; Benjamin Gifford; and George T. Bentley.

A small frame school in the village park was later replaced by Alden Union School (present Masonic Lodge Building), and this school was under the Board of Regents in 1897 and had 138 students. At this time there were four teachers.

In 1902 a wooden structure was used for the first time. It was replaced by a brick building in 1913, located on the present school site. In the course of years the brick building was remodeled and added to until at present it barely resembles the original structure. The Elementary and Middle School meet in the additions. Schools at Town Line and Millgrove have been replaced by new buildings to house some elementary grades. The Alden Senior High School on Park Street was completed in 1966. At present there are over 2,200 students enrolled in schools at Millgrove, Town Line and Alden Village.

We have mentioned the early schools but neglected to mention the one-room schoolhouse situated in each school district, in which the first eight grades were taught in the same room by one teacher. The district schools of Alden were centralized in 1949 and child-

ren were bused to Alden, Town Line, and Millgrove.

The first Parochial School was built in 1852 and another in 1882. The present brick building was started in 1936 and an addition made in 1953. Over 400 pupils can be accommodated.

The Alden Christian School (formerly called the Mennonite School) is located on Two Rod Road. This school teaches grades 1 through 9. It is interdenominational and offers a full New York State curriculum in a religious atmosphere.

In 1893 most of the land composing the 1971 campus of the State University of New York at Buffalo was owned by the County of Erie. The buildings thereon were those of the Hospital, Almshouse, and the Poor Farm. The Insane Asylum was also a part of this complex. Some of these buildings were destroyed by fire. Later a decision was made to move the County Almshouse elsewhere. In 1920 the Wendes, who owned the land on which the Infirmary and County Home are now located, were instrumental in getting the County to locate in Alden. The buildings started in 1923 were first occupied in 1926. The W.P.A. years in the 1930's brought more additions, other wings, and a cafeteria area, comprising 69% of the whole complex. Minor additions were made in 1949-50 and major improvements were made in 1963. Later a new boiler plant and sewage system were installed.

This health related facility, on 70 acres of landscaped lawns and gardens, provides expert care for 1,000 persons needing care ranging from total and partial care to complete self care. This is provided by a well-trained, paid staff, and many volunteers who come to help.

The ages of the residents range from the teens to over 100 years, with an average of 75 years. In the early years most of these people were "poor" or

"alms" cases, now they are from all walks of life and in different degrees of need; some have had accidents, others are just old. Through the years the "Home" has developed from a custodial and domiciliary institution to one of the most modern and skilled nursing and health care related institutions of New York State.

At present there are over 250 people on the waiting list. This will be reduced when a new 200 bed nursing home is completed during 1971. The existing buildings are being remodeled and renovated to comply with the latest building codes for New York State.

The present Administrator is Mr. Louis L. Scott, Deputy Commissioner of Social Services.

In the early 1920's the Board of Supervisors decided that a farm should be purchased outside the city where the most trusted inmates of the County Penitentiary would have something to do and also to help bring revenue back to the county by raising some of their food and dairy products. A barracks type building was constructed in Alden for housing. This worked out so well that by 1923 the present large brick building, modern in jail construction, was erected. This facility is known as the Erie County Penitentiary at Wende.

Dr. John M. Harrington came to Alden about 1825. The practice of medicine has been carried on by Doctors G. Allen, John B. Pride, Lucius Lilley, Grove C. Gage, Clarence A. Tyler, Ernest Wende, Carlos E. Bowman, Benjamin Gipple, and his son, Warren L. Gipple.

Dr. Raymond F. May began practice in 1928 and is still active in the village. Dr. Eugene Marks came in 1953 and left in 1968. Dr. Carl N. Schueler moved to Alden in March 1958 and left after ten years of practice. Dr. Allen Lebowitz, through the efforts of the

Chamber of Commerce, began his medical duties in 1968.

The Alden Historical Society was formally organized on April 21, 1965. The charter was kept open for six months and then extended to the first week of April 1966. At this time there were 53 members to sign the charter. The Town Historian is Mr. Ralph D. Stowell, having been appointed each year by the Town Board since 1951. The Society was formed to promote all matters of historical interest and to preserve and display records and artifacts of her history.

During the time from April 1965 to November 1966 meetings were held at the Alden Central School and the Village Municipal Building. At this time Walden C. Roberts purchased the house at 13213 Broadway and gave it to the Town in

memory of his wife, Frances Young Roberts, a charter member of the Society. The Town of Alden accepted this house for the exclusive use of the Alden Historical Society.

A provisional charter was granted on June 23, 1967. The absolute Charter has been granted by the New York State Board of Regents, and the formal presentation ceremonies were held at the Masonic Temple on August 4, 1971, as part of the Erie County Sesquicentennial Celebration.

Officers at present are: President, Nathan E. Sweet, Jr.; Vice President, William Scott; Treasurer, Walden C. Roberts; Secretary, Henrietta Henskee; Curator, Shirley S. Scott; Historian, Jackie Hojnicky; Trustees, Beverly Nebrich, June Richardson, and Zena Weimer.

Published by

THE BUFFALO AND ERIE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

in commemoration of

THE ERIE COUNTY SESQUICENTENNIAL

1971

**The Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society
disclaims responsibility for the statements,
whether of fact or opinion, made by the author.**